
Warning: Mild angst, violence and language.

Skathen – An Excerpt from Captain K. Akira's personal journals.

By: AK47

Where do I begin? Well, for starters, I'm not married to Queen Allura yet.

I have snuck away from the infirmary for the third time this week. Although I insist to Doctor Gorma that I am feeling better, he wishes for me to stay bedridden. It was okay for a while, and Skathen tried to keep me company, but he gets bored too easily and leaves. I don't blame him. I was getting bored too!

This time I have left with him, and we are hiding out in Black Dirge. Skathen is crawling around in the back somewhere, getting into something he shouldn't be. I'm hearing him throwing things out of his way. Hunk is going to chew me out for letting Skathen throw around all this delicate equipment, but that's all right. Skathen deserves a little fun right now. I am hoping the others will not find me long enough so I can update this journal.

I know that my last few entries have been scattered. But the preparations for the wedding had been driving me crazy. There are little things here and there, things that are said when they don't think I'm listening that are bringing up these images in my head. I'm trying to sort through all these images, these memories that I know are mine. But it's like they belong to someone else. It's like someone else's life, or dream, or nightmare.

The Queen and I have rescheduled the wedding. She has joked about chaining me to the altar this time. She visited before Skathen, but I wasn't in much of a talkative mood. I'm too distracted.

On top of that, I am unable to shake the memories of the past few days. Seeing the look on little Skathen's face after that bastard Zarkon had hit him. I feel guilty about it. Ever since Skathen's arrival, something in the back of my head would not let me get over the fact that he, this adorable little imp, is Lotor's son, my nephew... God! To think that bastard is my cousin!

Every time Skathen got on my nerves something inside me took immense pleasure in reminding me of that fact. It was an internal conflict I did not wish to deal with and after Zarkon hit Skathen, it seems to have disappeared.

I thought I had the upper hand. I was right at Zarkon's back, blaster at his neck. Stupidly, I hadn't counted on Skathen running towards me, allowing himself to get into reach of that monster. Zarkon grabbed Skathen, and slapped him across the face. There was an incredible look of shock on Skathen's face, and then he fought. I wasn't able to pull the trigger. The blast would definitely cut through both of them.

I have to hand it to the kid, though. He did his best to keep Zarkon from hanging onto him. If he were only a little stronger, I'm positive that with all the squirming he was doing, he would have gotten a good kick at Zarkon's ugly face.

Zarkon held Skathen tight with a dagger at his throat. I remember thinking to myself, 'God, that kid inherited Zarkon's lungs!' when Zarkon slapped him the second time and Skathen burst out into an unnatural howl.

"Scream all you want, brat. Your father's not here to save you anymore!" Zarkon had said. He had then turned enough to make eye contact with me. I wanted to pull the trigger, I really did. But for his age, Zarkon's reflexes are faster than mine. I knew for sure he would have had Skathen's throat slit open as I was beginning to apply pressure to the trigger.

"Now you insolent bug, if you want this imp to live, you can put down that water pistol and tell me the security codes for the Lions... er... Dirges... ah... whatever! I know you can deactivate them remotely." He was laughing at me.

"Let Skathen go. Let him go and I'll do whatever you want," I had said.

"Hah. Do you really believe I'm that naïve? Drop that squirt gun, and I'll consider it." Zarkon had sounded ironic.

I looked at Skathen. His eyes were shut tight in frustration and pain, and his voice was going hoarse.

Then I dropped the blaster.

The next thing I remember was Zarkon's guards pouncing on top of me and smacking me with all their strength, at least, that's what it felt like.

I remember Zarkon laughing his head off and tossing Skathen away. Skathen disappeared quicker than I thought possible.

Hang on! I'm getting ahead of myself. I suppose I should explain how Skathen and I even ended up on Doom, on my wedding day of all days!

As I have written in a previous entry, I proposed to Queen Allura three months ago and I mentioned in my last entry that this whole wedding business is making me nuts. I find myself thinking of Merla a lot. I remember that we were together for a while; even married. She was a knockout too. But I don't remember what happened to her. I know she's gone, but I don't remember why. Heck! I don't even remember what Merla was like in bed. It's frustrating!

I've been nervous as hell, to the point where I'm sure everyone is taking bets on when (not if) I'll faint during the ceremony. After all, this is not a repetition of the last time. This time we're not getting married for convenience but because I asked and she agreed out of her own free will.

Aside from the fact that Queen Allura has been moody as of late, something else has been bothering me. I'm really not sure why she accepted my proposal. I'm scared to death that maybe she only accepted it to get her mind off Lotor. Ever since he died, it seems as if she's been mourning him. I don't know if I'll ever be able to ask her of the reasons why she said yes. I know she's too honourable to do something like that. I'm positive of that. And to be quite truthful, I still don't know if she insisted in scouring Mourn to retrieve the blades – which escaped unscathed, to my outmost surprise – for Skathen or if she wanted a souvenir from Lotor.

Lotor, thou art my bane!

On top of everything else, Skathen has been a handful. The commotion in preparation for the wedding has made everyone just a little too busy to really take care of him, and he's finally come out of his depression; at least, I hope he has. He's been more rambunctious and I seem to be the only one willing to deal with him. Unfortunately, because of the stress of dealing with this wedding (and handling with the fact that I'm not even sure if Allura truly loves me, or if she's doing this as a distraction) I haven't been able to tend to Skathen for as long as I'm usually able.

Every single time he'd get out of hand, that nasty little thought would surface. *That's Skathen, the son of your most hated enemy*, I would have to leave Skathen and go vent somewhere else. I didn't want Skathen to see me that upset. I know he's curious to know why my knuckles were so bloody whenever I returned from venting.

The day before the wedding, I was taking Skathen out, to keep him from all the cakes and desserts that Nan and the others were working on for the reception. Everyone else was too busy getting their uniforms fitted, or helping with the decorations. They pretty much left me with nothing to do, on purpose, so that I would have to baby sit the brat.

The trading caravan had come by and I was hoping that all this excitement would make him exhausted enough to sit through the wedding without swinging from the chandeliers or something. He caught sight of someone selling candied apples and I got him one.

I'm not quite sure how he managed to do what he did. One second he was enjoying the candy, the next, he had stuck it in my hair, and was pulling on it, trying to get it out. I'm not certain what kind of glue they used to make the glaze, but I'm going to recommend it to Hunk when he repairs the Dirges! (Curse Lotor for changing the Lions! Now everyone keeps calling them Dirges and I can't say I like that.)

Let's just say that for the first time since I was four my hair isn't past my shoulders anymore. Skathen has pretty much ensured that my hair will look 'appropriate' for someone who's marrying a Queen. Right now, I feel like Alfalfa from the Little Rascals. The back of my hair is standing up and Skathen is getting no end of laughs from how ridiculous I look.

"Skay, I'll buy you another one, just stop pulling!" I had pleaded.

Skathen gave it one more good yank, and stared at me as if this was all my fault. "I wanna thatta one, Key." Skathen is still unable to say my name.

"I'll buy you a better one." *One that's not so sticky.*

"Fine." Skathen shrugged and left me to dislodge the super-adhesive object from my hair.

I got nowhere fast, and when I realized that I had not seen where Skathen had gone, I panicked. I took out my pocket-knife and cut it out. I'm sure my expression matched Skathen's the last time anyone tried to cut his hair.

I searched the area, but there was no sign of him. The last person who had seen him told me he had headed off into the forest.

The nasty little thought was threatening to get in my head again, taunt me that I was wasting too much time on him. I should have been getting some rest. The next day was promising to be long and nerve racking.

As I reached the split in the path, I paused to pick which direction Skathen might have decided to go. I figured the hard one, knowing well enough that the kid would pick the absolutely most overgrown, difficult path to explore. I wonder sometimes if he does that on purpose.

I had only gone half way through the first ten feet of the path, and I knew my pants were already filthy and ripped. I had whacked my head on some low branches and at that point I could feel the blood trickling down the side of my head. My voice was pretty much gone from screaming for him to come out, pronto. And I had the beginnings of what promised to be a migraine.

Ten feet more, and my throat hurt too much to yell. My head was pounding and Skathen decided to top it all off by leaping on top of me from the trees. Instinctively, in the mess, I allowed him to land on top of me, instead of the thorn bush that he would have landed on otherwise.

"Okay kiddo. We're going home."

"I don't wanna!" Skathen tried to run off. He suddenly stopped in the small clearing, giving me a chance to grab onto him.

"I wanna go over there!" Skathen struggled like there was no tomorrow. I couldn't figure out what was so fascinating over there that was grabbing his attention.

"What's over there?" I asked.

"Is secret!" Skathen giggled, and it was clear that he was not going to tell me. He began struggling again. Luckily, we had all learned at this point that if you grabbed this kid by his hair, he'd go limp and that's what I was doing, all the way back to the castle.

When we finally got back, I let him go. Before he had a chance to run off, Nan had spotted us.

"Keith! Skathen! You two boys are a mess! I can't believe you are behaving like this the day before you are to marry the Queen! To the bathroom, now! March!" Nan's stern voice was not as strong as Nanny's, but it did not help my migraine much.

To top it up, the little rascal had taken immense pleasure in standing beside Nan, mockingly scolding me with her.

"Alright, Skay, go grab your bath toys," I said.

"Yay!" Skathen of course ran to the bathroom, and dove into the empty tub, waiting.

Ever since he got here, we discovered that he only takes baths with someone. Allura was too shy. The guys were not willing, and since I'm supposedly used to bathing with other people (it's a Japanese thing) I have since become Skathen's bath partner.

I should also note that since this has started I've smelt like bubble gum or tutti-frutti every time I come from bathing. The team found this particularly humorous and still bother me about it from time to time. Even Allura giggled when she mentioned that she likes the way the baby shampoo smells.

For the second time that day, Skathen ensured my hair would be short. I stupidly let him wash my hair, and he managed to get his toy battleship tangled in it. Before he had a chance to yank on it, I grabbed some scissors and cut off yet another section of my hair. Lance had fun trimming my hair later on that evening.

Skathen decided that this was getting funny and tried to tangle more toys in my hair again. That's when I pretty much lost it.

"Skathen! Stop it! Relax for a minute, will ya!" I hadn't mean to yell at him, and judging by the huge puppy dog eyes, he didn't like it. The guilt began gnawing at me immediately.

Skathen crawled out of the tub and stood facing a wall. This was the worse punishment for him. whenever he knew he had been in trouble, he would simply go to a wall and stare at it until he was told that everything was okay.

"Look Skay, I don't like having to cut my hair either. But if you keep trying to do that, I'll be bald before we're done taking a bath. Come back here."

"Okay," Skathen sounded very disappointed, and he didn't take quite as many dives into the bathtub from the sink as he normally did.

There was a twinge of jealousy when Skathen was led off to bed. He pretty much slept with Allura every night. I wonder how he's going to manage on our wedding night.

"How come he gets to see Allura and I don't?" I demanded, more out of jealousy than reason.

"Because he's not getting married to her tomorrow. Don't you know it's bad luck for the groom to see the bride before the wedding?" Lance laughed, as he carried Skathen off.

"Goodnight, Skay."

Skathen did not acknowledge me. I assume he was still sore about me raising my voice at him.

Thus, as luck would have it, I didn't sleep well. I felt guilty all night.

The next day started off fairly well. I managed to dodge Nan long enough to at least eat breakfast without having that straightjacket laced to me. Just as I finished the last bit of cereal, she had forced me into my dress uniform and pinned all those ridiculous medals to it.

"Now you look handsome enough to marry the Queen," Nan said. I wondered if she was related to Nanny somehow.

One of the other servants brought in Skathen, fully dressed in a suit, looking just as displeased with the entire situation as I was.

"Now Skathen, you stay with Keith, while me and de others ~~get~~ ready, okay?" Nan handed Skathen a handful of sweets and pinched his cheek.

Skathen squirmed as he usually did, looked at the handful of candy then temporarily forgot how uncomfortable he felt and sat on my bed, getting crumbs all over it.

"Oh great. Get him hyped up on sugar and leave him here with me!" I was not pleased.

I remember pacing my room, waiting for Lance to tell me when they were all ready for me to show up when Skathen got it in his head to tear out at high speed.

Great, the sugar high hit him, I thought to myself, and went after the imp.

Skathen, being hyped up on sugar, managed to get a good lead on me. It wasn't until we reached the same clearing that had caught his attention the day before that I caught up to him.

I looked at the state we were both in. His suit and my uniform were ripped, grass stains on both of us, and dirt everywhere. Nan was going to have a heart attack.

I grabbed Skathen and looked at him.

"You know, Nan's going to have a cat."

"Really? How?" Skathen looked very curious.

"I mean, she's going to get mad at us."

"We've been naughty?" Skathen looked confused. "When?"

"Just now."

Skathen looked at the state of his suit. "Ooops!" He giggled. "We hide until Nan's asleeping."

"Skathen! I have to get married to Allura! I can't go hide. Allura will get mad!"

"So it's naughty for you to hide?" Skathen did not look convinced.

"What is it about this clearing that has your attention?"

"Is secret!" Skathen insisted again. Before I could ask again, he put his finger over my lips to shush me. "Is coming."

"What?" I whispered.

There was a glimmer of light deeper into the forest. Now I was curious. I carried Skathen towards it, to get a better look.

As we neared, it became apparent that it was a Doomite probe of some sort. I dove by the nearest tree, holding Skathen. The glimmering we had seen was a scanner sweep.

"Skay, we gotta get out of here, fast!"

"Why?"

"You found a Doomite Spy Probe. Good work!" I said, and ruffled his hair.

Skathen blew on his nails and rubbed them against the lapel of his jacket, a gesture I'm positive he got from his father. "I'm so buff," he said proudly.

"I know." I couldn't help but smile at his confidence.

When the twigs snapped from behind me, I realized that I was only armed with my family sword, which was part of my uniform. I had left my blaster behind. Skathen seemed unaware. I put my finger to my lips, telling him to be really quiet. He complied, but he looked suspicious. I was sure that there was only one battle droid out there, judging by the mechanical whir they all make. I peeked around the tree, cautiously. The droid had his back to us.

"Skathen, when I jump out, you run back to the Castle and tell Hunk that there's trouble, okay?" I whispered.

"Okay, team!"

I didn't have to think hard to figure out where he got that from.

Surprisingly my ancestors had done a good job on making this samurai sword. It sliced through the droid better than I expected. Skathen began running towards the castle before another group of droids appeared from nowhere and grabbed him.

I remember running after them, then feeling a laser cut through my left shoulder. I stumbled, everything went black and I woke up in shackles in the brig of a carrier from Province Eighteen. Skathen had curled up beside me for warmth and had fallen asleep.

My shoulder was killing me. My head was killing me. I must have banged my head when I tripped. But why was the bump on the back of my head? I figured the piece my memory which was missing, was probably of some droid pistol-whipping me when I had fallen.

I looked over Skathen to make sure he was okay. He woke up, stretched and yawned.

"Are we there yet?"

"I don't think so. Do you know where we're going?"

Skathen shrugged his shoulders. "Don't you know?"

"Probably to Doom."

Skathen shuddered. "I donwanna go!" He stomped his foot down. "I like it at the Castle."

"So do I."

Part II

We arrived on Eighteen not too long after Skathen had declared that he did not want to go there. Skathen put up a huge fuss when the guards arrived to escort us off the ship.

"I don't like you," he told every single person approaching him. I really wanted to applaud him, but I was in no condition to do anything considering that I was shackled up like some wild animal.

Skathen kicked up a tantrum (a la Lotor) when the guards picked him up over his shoulder. His screeches echoed incredibly through the entire ship.

Cossack appeared at that point. I really resent the fact that he had not been on Doom when the Brethan had attacked the planet ten years before. Instead, him and Mogor had been off somewhere else and lost their chance to be assassinated. Dang ...

"Skathen, don'tcha remember me? It's your Unca Cossack! Remember?" Cossack made some strange face and babbled in baby talk. Skathen stopped howling only for a moment to give Cossack an 'Okay, buddy, you're absolutely bonkers' look and took another deep breath. Obviously Cossack knew Skathen well enough and clamped his hands over his ears quickly. I only wished they hadn't shackled my arms behind my back so I could follow suit... Skathen had definitely inherited Zarkon's lung capacity.

"Take that kid to see his grampa!" Cossack yelled over Skathen's fit. I tried to follow but the guards pulled me back and the thing around my neck wasn't exactly soft.

"Damn you all to hell! Let me go!" I demanded, after the ringing in my ears stopped.

"So I see you haven't forgotten us," Cossack leered taking the chains from the guard. "Welcome to where you rightfully belong, as a prisoner of King Zarkon."

"Stuff it, toad boy," I said. Thinking back, I reason that outburst was due to being pistol-whipped a little too hard.

"What is it about that stupid pond stuff?" Cossack wondered out loud, and glared at me. "Shut up!"

Cossack then proceeded to half drag me after Skathen to Zarkon's throne room. There's another one ... Why couldn't the Brethan just have killed Zarkon off too... When I think of all the coincidences, makes me wonder if Mauld didn't have anything to do with it.

By the time we had reached the throne room, Skathen had quieted down and was staring suspiciously at Zarkon who was trying very hard to get him to say something.

"Come on, boy. You know who I am." Zarkon shook a toy in front of Skathen. "Say something."

Skathen gave him the same look that he'd graced Cossack with earlier. Skathen caught sight of me and tore down the steps and attached himself to me, knocking me flat on my back. I swear I was seeing stars.

"Key! I wanna go home..." Skathen gave me an odd look. "Why are you making funny faces?"

"Because I'm hurting," I managed to explain.

"Oh," Skathen looked thoughtful. "But I wanna go home!"

"But you are home." Zarkon smiled. "Mogor! Take this boy to Lotor's old apartments."

"But sire..." Mogor stammered. "You had them cleared out."

"Then get someone to redecorate and toss, er-um, escort the brat-er um, this fine child to it," Zarkon said.

"Daddy's right. He is a weirdo," Skathen whispered to me.

"I heard that!" Zarkon bellowed.

Skathen jumped off of me and stood defiantly beside me. "I don't like you, you meanie."

It wasn't hard to guess that Zarkon was doing everything in his power not to strangle Skathen. Old fish face's blue tone was turning purple.

"Look, kid, I'm sorry if I'm a meanie. Do you want some candy? I can give you all the candy you want if you come here." Zarkon held out a chocolate bar.

Skathen looked at me, and then back at Zarkon. He crunched up his face in confusion and sat down. "How much candy?" Skathen asked after a moment of silence.

"Skathen don't listen to him," I said, and received a well placed kick in my ribs from Cossack.

"Quiet, you Alliance scum," Cossack hissed.

"Stop being naughty to Key," Skathen declared.

"Fine. If I promise that we'll be nice to the Captain here, will you come over here?" Zarkon pleaded.

"How much candy?" Skathen asked again.

Zarkon searched his robes hastily. "As much as you want."

"Five gazillion candies?" Skathen looked hopeful.

"Yes, yes. Five gazillion." Zarkon was trembling holding back his anger. I wanted to laugh.

Skathen turned and knelt down beside me, whispering. "If they're mean to you, tell me. I'll get you some candies too if you want."

"Skathen, don't trust him."

"I know," Skathen said. "Daddy said so."

Skathen stood up. "Gimmee!" holding his hand out to Zarkon.

Zarkon sighed and tossed the chocolate to Skathen. It landed nearby on the floor. Skathen did not look impressed.

"NO! That's not how you do it. You have to hand it to me! Key says that it's not nice to throw things at people. You're naughty," Skathen scolded, arms akimbo.

Omigod. That kid's actually registering some of the stuff I've been trying to teach him! I thought to myself. I also cringed, positive that Zarkon was going to get me back for that.

"Oh, is that what he said?" Zarkon was shaking angrily. "Skathen, my boy, how would you like to play a game? It's called 'Holding the Captain Hostage until Arus surrenders unconditionally'."

Skathen pouted. "I don't like it. Name's too long. Wanna play baseball?"

"Cossack! Mogor! Take this runt away and play baseball with him! I've had enough!" Zarkon bellowed.

I truly wished I could have watched this game. Skathen is the reason that all of us have to wear cups and helmets whenever we play baseball with him. Skathen grasped the game incredibly fast, and his aim was deadly. I felt sympathy pains for them.

"But sire, we don't know how to play baseball," Mogor started.

An inspiration. "Skathen?" I called. He turned to look at me. "Why don't you show them how to play Skathen-ball?"

Skathen's eyes lit up. "Yeah!"

Let me explain Skathen-Ball. Here is something that Skathen invented himself. Just so for reference, it's just as bad as his baseball.

I know he doesn't know about it, but the game is basically like something called Calvin-Ball. It comes from an Earth comic strip called Calvin and Hobbes. Lance is a big fan of them and he has shown me the strips regarding the game. You make up the rules as you go along, and in Skathen's case, only he gets to make up and change the rules, period. This game was the only opportunity that Skathen had to launch his powder bombs and know he wasn't going to get in trouble for it.

"You, be quiet!" Zarkon screamed at me. "Now run along, little Skathen. Uncle Mogor and Uncle Cossack will play your little game with you. If you need more players, just get some guards, okay?"

"Yay!" Skathen ran off, taking a very nervous looking Mogor and Cossack out of the throne room.

Zarkon stormed down the steps as soon as Skathen and his new playmates were out of hearing range. He grabbed the chain and yanked on it until I was kneeling.

"You won't get away with this."

"Lotor was right, you guys need new lines," Zarkon snapped. "I already have gotten away with this, little man."

I hate it when they call me that. I'm five foot eleven. I'm taller than average!

"What do you need Skathen for?" I demanded.

"He's heir to my kingdom. What else would I need the little runt for?" Zarkon laughed.

"I'm sure Lotor left enough bastards for you to pick from, what's so important about Skathen?"

"Hah! So you do like that little bug. How sweet," Zarkon snorted.

"What does that have to do with anything?" I asked.

Zarkon rolled his eyes at me. "Are you that dense that you can't figure these things on your own? Humph! No wonder you have to state the obvious all the time."

"I do not!" That was low.

"Yeah, right. 'Hey team, the robeast's going to destroy the castle if we don't do something...'" Zarkon said with an annoying smirk on his face.

I was fuming. "Well, you're still not going to get away with this. The Dirges will be here before you know it, and then you'll be sorry. And don't forget, your son retrofitted them to be optimal. You don't stand a chance."

Zarkon took this opportunity to backhand me across the face.

"If you think you can turn Skathen into your little conquering tool, you're sadly mistaken. He's nothing like Lotor," I spat. It had felt as if Zarkon had knocked out a few of my teeth. I could taste blood.

"You're so naïve. Lotor was easy to mould. Don't think I can't do the same thing again. Only this time, Skathen will be everything his father wasn't. There won't be any little princesses to capture his heart," Zarkon laughed.

Down the hallway behind Zarkon's throne I could hear Cossack and Mogor screaming. I couldn't help but smile, despite all the pain I was in.

"Silence you fools! Don't tell me that little runt is that much trouble!" Zarkon bellowed.

At that, Hagar's cat – I suppose it was still haunting the castle after the witch's death by the hand of the Brethan – came racing out, a panicked look in its eyes. I had to laugh outright. Skathen had dropped his infamous powder bomb on the cat, which was no longer blue. It disappeared from the throne room in a cloud of baby powder.

"What in the world...?" Zarkon blinked at the thing that had darted through. Before he could figure out what was going on, a huge powder bomb, a la Skathen, landed squarely in his face.

Uh-oh.

"I got 'im good!" Skathen jumped from behind the throne, a proud look on his face.

I was too busy shaking the fallout off of myself, and wondering how Skathen had appeared by the throne, to say anything. For a few minutes all I could smell and taste was baby powder.

"Why you little...!" Zarkon made a move towards Skathen.

"If you do anything to him, so help me God, I swear I will kill you," I snarled.

Zarkon actually jumped at that. "Damn you, you sound exactly like Lotor. That's something the little upstart would have said."

"Skathen! Go play hide and seek with the others!" I said, trying not to laugh at Skathen's victory dance on the throne. It was something like a conga line, but all by himself. I was also trying to push away Zarkon's comment. Me? Sounding like Lotor?! Did he even know that I was Lotor's cousin? Urgh, the thought makes me want to be sick.

"Yay!" Skathen ran off.

Zarkon turned to me, his rage clearly beginning to boil over. "I should throw you in the Pit of Skulls right now. But you're too valuable. I need you to lure the others here. In the meantime..."

Zarkon motioned for his guards to chain me to one of the beams in the throne room.

"And don't take your eyes off that one. His streak of luck is phenomenal." Zarkon said to the guards.

"My streak of luck?" I was curious to know what the heck he was talking about.

"You've been captured three times, and all three times you've managed to escape. I doubt you've got the brains to hatch an escape plan all by yourself, so it must be luck, huh?" Zarkon walked away laughing, while I sat against the beam, fuming, wanting desperately to slap his ugly scarred face.

Part III

By some miracle I managed to fall asleep after Zarkon had left. I woke up when Skathen came running back into the throne room giggling. His hands were pure white from the powder bombs he'd been making. He ran up to me and hugged me around my neck.

"Key! It was fun!" He said happily, pointing at Cossack, Mogor and several guards who emerged from the hallway covered in powder from head to toe. "I got 'em good! Unca Cossack fall down go ploof!" Skathen giggled madly and then looked me over. "How come you all tied up?"

"Because we're playing a game." Zarkon had come out of nowhere before I could answer.

Skathen tilted his head suspiciously at Zarkon. "What kind?"

"A game for big people," Zarkon said.

"Skathen, he's going to hurt me and you," I managed to say before one of the guards had pulled me back by the chain around my neck, leaving me choking.

"Tha'ss not nice," Skathen scolded the guard and kicked him in the shins. The guard hopped around swearing under his breath but made no move towards Skathen.

"But Skathen, sweet brat, er, child," Zarkon sounded as if he were trying to sound pleasant. "Keith hasn't been very nice to us."

Skathen looked surprised. "Whadya mean?" Skathen asked.

"Keith used to beat your father up all the time," Zarkon said.

I cringed. This was something I wasn't ready to deal with at the moment.

"You lie. Liar," Skathen said, crossing his arms at Zarkon. He turned to me, and eyed me carefully. "Is true?" Skathen whispered.

"Uh... Sky, it's a long story. I'll tell you later, 'kay?"

Skathen nodded. "Okay, but don't forget."

"King Zarkon, I've managed to salvage some of Lotor's items. They are in his apartments," Mogor announced wearily.

"Hey brat, er... Skathen. Why don't you go to your room? I'm sure Mogor and Cossack have filled it with wonderful toys." Zarkon gave Skathen a friendly smile.

Skathen's eyes lit up. "O'tay!" He turned back to me. "I be back later, Key."

"Be careful!" I called after him, but he had disappeared from the room.

"Mogor, Cossack ! Go and keep an eye on that brat!" Zarkon commanded.

"Aye sire." Both sounded exhausted when they answered.

Zarkon turned to me. "It seems that your pathetic friends are on their way here. How would you like to say hello to them?"

I just glared at him.

Zarkon turned to his communication screen and contacted the Force.

"Why hello there!" Zarkon sounded particularly cheerful. "I see you're all quite eager to meet your doom!" Zarkon cackled.

"Zarkon, you dirty rat. Let Keith and Skathen go and we'll consider not pounding your pathetic face into the dirt!" I heard Lance saying as heroically as he could.

"Strong words from someone who is in no position to threaten me," Zarkon laughed and motioned for the guards to bring me into the viewer area.

"Keith!" The team said in synchronization.

"Keith! Are you alright?" Queen Allura sounded very concerned.

I realized how horrible I looked, dried blood on my chin, a blaster wound through my shoulder that was probably infected by now. My uniform torn and filthy... well you get the picture.

"I'm alright. Skathen's doing okay," I said.

"Zarkon, you let them go right now or..." Lance began.

"Or what?" Zarkon laughed. His reflexes were frighteningly fast. Before I could comprehend what was going on, he had pulled a dagger from his robe and had it pressed against my throat. "Try what you like! You'd be doing me a favour! I've wanted this little bug dead for a long time."

God, please let this work, I prayed silently. I threw myself backwards against the two guards. They fell, dropping me. I fell to the floor hard. Seizing my only opportunity to do anything, I kicked Zarkon's legs as hard as I could manage. He toppled to the floor, the dagger landing point down, into the floor, inches from my face.

"Team! Don't worry about me! I'll be okay," I said knowing they could still hear what was happening.

That's when the pain hit me. The adrenaline rush was gone. I had landed on my bad shoulder, and the agony, when it finally hit, was incredible. I had only barely escaped Zarkon's reflexes. He had moved towards me as fast as I had moved away. But his blade had managed to break the skin on my throat. I could feel the blood trickling down from the small wound.

The communication channel went dead.

Zarkon picked himself off the floor and grabbed me by my throat, to look me in the eye. (He's taller than me, so you can imagine how comfortable I was.) He eyed the blood before speaking.

"Next time worm, I won't be so gentle." That was all I can remember him saying before everything went black.

Skathen had curled up to me while I was unconscious. The guards had tossed me into what I found out later to be Lotor's apartments. I had never ventured in there before. I remember when I had become the Viceroy of Eighteen, I avoided this room as if it were plagued.

Zarkon had decided to keep Skathen prisoner in a place he was used to, even though the lavishly decorated apartments looked rather messy on account that Mogor, Cossack and the guards had done a rush job getting it back in order.

Surprisingly, they had unshackled me. I picked up Skathen, trying not to wake him and placed him on the bed that looked way too big for anyone. For the first time, he actually continued sleeping, snuggling into one of the huge pillows. Normally Skathen would wake up if the person he was sleeping with left him.

"At least one of us is comfortable," I said to no one in particular. I tried the door, but it was locked. I could hear at least three guards outside.

Feeling a little guilty, I began going through the room, looking for anything that might help. When I found Lotor's bathroom, I began to wonder why they had locked me up here, in an executive suite instead of my usual room in the dungeons.

"Probably because they found the tunnel you dug down there the last time, stupid," I said to myself. Oh yes. I tend to talk to myself if no one else is around. I'm not sure where this weird habit came from, though Doctor Gorma says it's probably something to do with Mauld's little mind game. I washed up, trying to treat all the injuries to the best of my ability. At that point, I couldn't feel my left arm anymore.

Skathen began to wake up when I found something more comfortable in the boxes of clothes lying around. It was a little big on me, but it was clean. I remember it was Lotor's Academy uniform when we first met so many years ago ... it feels like a life time to me now!

"Key, whatchya doing?" Skathen rubbed the sleep from his eyes.

"Trying to figure a way out of here," I answered.

Skathen has two settings: off and ballistic.

He jumped out of the bed and bounded towards me, full tilt. He attached himself to my waist, knocking me back a few steps.

"Skay? Is there any other way out of here?" I cursed myself for never exploring the castle while I had stayed here as Viceroy ... I honestly don't remember much of that time, only hazy bits.

Skathen nodded his head enthusiastically.

"Where?"

"Is secret," Skathen smiled.

My heart immediately sank. "Skathen, we have to get out of here. Zarkon's going to hurt you." *And kill and maim me a few times*, I thought to myself. The thought that Skathen was Lotor's son began edging its way to the front of the train (of thought).

"Is secret!" Skathen insisted and bounded back to the bed, proceeding to use it as a trampoline.

"Skathen!" I yelled. "We are going to die unless we get out of here, okay? I don't want to die and I know you don't."

Skathen pouted. He jumped off the bed and stood in a corner, facing it.

I used a few choice words at that moment. Thankfully, Skathen hasn't repeated any of them, yet.

"Skathen, I'm really sorry. I didn't mean to get mad. I'm scared, okay? I'm not used to this place. I wanna go home, back to Arus. Don't you?"

Skathen nodded, but did not turn to look at me.

"Skay. I need your help."

Skathen finally turned around. "Did you beat my dad up?"

I had to sit down. "Skathen, it's not that simple... can I explain this some other time?"

Skathen came over and sat beside me. "Tell me now."

I sighed. "Skay, your dad and I, well, we never got along all that well. He used to beat me up a lot too."

Skathen tilted his head. "My dad's buff, that's why."

"Yeah. He's buff," I nodded, remembering all the wounds that bastard inflicted on me.

"Look, Chibi, I only beat your dad up because he beat on me. Okay?"

Skathen looked thoughtful. "Alright," he said slowly.

"That doesn't change the fact that I love you very much," I added.

Skathen nodded then pointed up to a vent. "Tha's one way, but only I can fit."

"Anything we can both go through?" I asked, hopefully.

"Maybe," Skathen said, smiling again.

I clenched my fist and counted to ten a few times, to clear out my head.

"Skathen. Please tell me."

Skathen looked as if he were going to answer when a blast rocked the castle. It sounded like a Dirge missile.

Skathen had parasited himself to my waist at that.

"Skathen, did your dad every watch any of the battles from here, in the room?" I asked.

Skathen nodded and pulled me over to Lotor's desk. He pushed a few buttons and a screen popped up.

Black and Yellow Dirges were attacking the castle. I assume they had contacted Sven in my absence. That meant that the other three were somewhere on the surface, trying to get into the castle.

"Skathen. Now's our chance to get out of here! Tell me where the other exit is."

Skathen crossed his arms. "No. We have to pack."

"What?!"

"I wanna take this stuff home," Skathen made an attempt to pull the bed towards the door.

"Skay, we can't take this stuff. They're not going to let us move this stuff to a ship!"

Skathen frowned and pouted.

"Skathen, where are your dad's bags and stuff? We'll take what we can, okay?" I couldn't believe what I was agreeing to.

Skathen jumped up and ran into the closet. He tossed out a few suitcases and stepped out moments later with a pile of clothing, including Lotor's usual uniform. He had put on Lotor's helmet and looked really ridiculous trying to walk around with it covering his eyes.

I took Lotor's uniform shirt from his arms and rolled up the sleeves on it. I took off the helmet and shoved the shirt over him. "Look Skay, if you have to wear something, wear this. It won't fall over your eyes."

Skathen looked down at the tasselled shirt and smiled. "Otay!" He looked comical in the shirt that hung on him like a strange dress.

Another blast rocked the castle. I helped Skathen pack as much as we could carry. "Okay Skay, where's the other way to get out? We gotta get going before Zarkon comes in here!"

Skathen led me to the farthest end of the apartments and pressed a panel in. The thing slid aside revealing a long, dark corridor.

"Great work, kiddo. Where does this lead to?"

Skathen made a noise that sounded something like: 'I dunno'. "Daddy went through here and then he would fly away in his ship."

It was obvious by the sound of the voices coming from ahead where we were exactly.

"The harem? Skathen we have to get out of here. We have to get to a ship or something," I pleaded.

Skathen nodded and guided me through the blackness. We soon stumbled upon Zarkon's harem. Skathen wandered in and jumped back a little from the sight.

"Weren't here before," Skathen whispered to me. "Used to be empty."

He continued walking through after the women made no move towards him. They just stared at both of us, surprised more than anything. A suspicious look remained on Skathen's face until we finally got out.

Believe you me, I was trying my best not to stare. It hurt a lot. Zarkon has good taste in women.

Skathen led me to the end of the room where a doorway stood. He punched in a series of numbers and the door slid open. At the other side of the door a cabinet of blasters stood open. I grabbed one and continued following. Another long corridor and I could hear Zarkon issuing commands in the distance. I pulled Skathen back.

"We can't go into the throne room. We'll get killed!"

"Don't be scared. Just be real quiet, okay?" He whispered.

We crawled through the shadows of the throne room, and much to my surprise no one seemed to notice our passing. We had just gone past the back of the throne and we had a clear passage to the corridor leading to the hangars when something fell out of the bag Skathen was carrying.

Lotor's helmet landed with a loud clank that echoed through the chamber. Skathen jumped at the sound. He gathered up the helmet and tore towards the hangar, only to have guards chasing after him.

At that I had leapt up and had the blaster pointed to Zarkon's head.

"Zarkon, if those guards so much as breathe on Skathen, I'll have your brains splattered all over this throne room."

Zarkon started a little but made no move this time. He had heard me put the blaster off safe and increase the power of the beam so that it would discharge completely in one shot.

"Damn you, Alliance scum," Zarkon muttered.

"Zarkon, don't doubt me. I could kill you with my bare hands if I wanted to. I know exactly where to hit you," I hissed. I had lowered the blaster pistol to the very base of the back of his neck. Zarkon shuddered. I had been taught that was the weakest spot on the Doomite anatomy. Zarkon had it covered with a steel plate, but he knew that the proximity of the laser would instantly cut through it.

"You wouldn't dare..."

"For Skathen, I would," I said.

Shortly the guards returned carrying Skathen, who was struggling to no end.

"Let the brat go!" Zarkon said.

The guards dropped Skathen and he ran to me.

"Skathen, no!" I yelled too late.

The shock of his unexpected reaction had made me slip and the blaster was no longer pointed at that critical spot. It had slipped up toward Zarkon's head again.

Zarkon grabbed Skathen, and slapped him across the face. There was an incredible look of shock on Skathen's face, and well, you know the rest.

The guards picked me off the ground and held me so that I would face Zarkon.

"The codes?" Zarkon smiled at me.

"Let me think..." I said. One of the guards slapped me. "Ow!"

"Tell me the codes now, or I'll have the guards kill that insolent brat!"

I realised I had no idea if Skathen was safely away or in the custody of guards.

I rattled off some random numbers.

Zarkon looked pleased and tried them. I could see the look of satisfaction on his face turn to complete hatred when he realised they were not working.

"Guards! Take the little worm to Mogor's laboratory. He'll get those codes from him, right Professor?"

"Aye sire!" Mogor said, pleased to have a new subject to experiment upon.

But the guards had suddenly dropped me.

Something crashed into the Castle. I looked around and saw Skathen peeking around a corner. He was motioning for me to follow him. He tossed a large powder bomb into the commotion, adding to the distraction and allowing me to escape somewhat unnoticed. I somehow managed to drag myself to where I had last seen Skathen.

After what seemed like forever we reached the hangar. Skathen began to weave his way around the many large ship components that were strewn about. Looking around I realised that this was the very place where Lotor must have constructed, and hidden his phenomenal battleships. That the hangar itself remained secret for so long was quite beyond my understanding. How the heck do you hide something that big without anyone noticing? I found myself wondering if Rue might be around in this gargantuan hangar.

As if to answer my question, Skathen stood waiting by the silver ship. I had gasped involuntarily and mentally cursed myself for not being in any condition to finally pilot that beauty.

Judging by the amount of clothing that was hanging from the cockpit, Skathen had haphazardly stuffed everything we were carrying into it.

I remember falling just beside the chair. I didn't want to move anymore. My body wanted to shut down. I was in pain and I knew if I let go, it would all go away.

Skathen sat in the pilot chair looked down at me. "Key, you fly," he tried to pull me up onto the chair, with no success.

"No Skay. Today, you're flying," I must have said it coherently enough because a huge smile crossed Skathen's tear streaked face. "Skathen, listen to everything I tell you, okay? We'll be out of here faster if you do."

Skathen nodded enthusiastically, his long hair falling in front of his face.

I instructed him as best as I could on how to fly the craft.

"Okay, first you pull back on the control bar a little, until it feels like we're off the ground."

Skathen pulled back hard, and the craft shook violently having hit the ceiling of the hangar.

"Pull down a little bit now."

The ship hovered with very little stability. I looked up briefly at the commands and realised that Skathen would have to open the escape gates as well. Surprisingly, he followed my instructions carefully and the ceiling opened, revealing a colossal tunnel leading to the outside; undoubtedly big enough to accommodate even Griefe's bulk.

"Now push the control bar gently to the side until you are facing the opening."

Skathen did as he was told. He hopped out of the seat and stomped on the pedal, sending the craft towards the exit.

"Skathen, pull back on the bar as soon as we're outside, okay?"

Skathen nodded and desperately peeked over the panel, trying to see.

The ship rocked violently. The Doomites had opened fire on the ship as soon as we had reached the outside.

"See the red button on the bar? Keep pressing that until there's nothing bad in front of you. It's like a video game."

Skathen opened fire, and giggled amused.

“Now step on the pedal there.”

My legs went numb at that point and it was getting near impossible for me to keep my eyes open.

“Skathen. Flip the switch on that side and press in the numbers I tell you. Tell Lance we're okay and that you're flying the ship.”

Skathen did as I said, opening the private communication link with Red Dirge. I was positive that Lance would understand what I was trying to say through Skathen and remotely pilot the ship out of here. As soon as I felt the ship's motion stabilize I let myself go. I had a dream that Skathen had jumped out of the pilot seat and held onto me, asking me not to leave.

As you can see, I have not left Skathen and he turned out to be a better pilot than I thought. Rue, carefully crafted by Lotor, was in excellent condition when it reached Arus. He hadn't smacked off the hangar as hard as it had felt; or the fighter was just – as I believe – phenomenal; after all, Lotor did crash land with it and it still looked as good as new.

I'm pretty much indebted to Skathen for saving my life. Apparently the dream was partially true. He did jump out of the chair and hugged me around my neck. That had applied enough pressure to stop the internal bleeding that was very close to killing me, so I was later informed. He held on until Pidge and Hunk managed to board the craft and take care of me.

Despite the fact that Skathen is the son of my most despised enemy, I have sworn to myself that I will treat him as my own.

I know he will never accept me in place of Lotor, but that's only right. I just hope I can care for him as much as Lotor did.

Now I end this journal entry, which was probably a little scattered only because there's a certain, very lovable, little imp in the back of Black Dirge threatening me with a powder bomb; only because he knows he won't ever get into trouble for it again, with me at least.